

THE LEGEND OF GOODE WIMMEN PROLOGUE



THOUSAND SYTHES HAVE I HERD
men telle,
That ther is joye in heven, and peyne in helle;
And I acorde wel that hit be so;
But natheles, this wot I wel also,
That ther nis noon that dwelleth in this
contree,
That either bath in helle or heven ybe,

Ne may of hit non other weyes witen,
But as he hath herd seyde, or founde hit
writen;
for by assay ther may no man hit preve.
But goddes forbode, but men shulde leve
Wel more thing then men han seen with ye!
Men shal nat wenen everyting a lyf
for that he seigh it nat of yore ago.
God wot, a thing is never the lesse so
Thogh every wight ne may hit nat ysee.
Bernard the monk ne saugh nat al, parde!
THAN mote we to bokes that we finde,
Through which that olde thinges been
in minde,
And to the doctrine of these olde wyse,
Yeven credence, in every skilful wyse,
And trowen on these olde aproved stories
Of holinesse, of regnes, of victories,
Of love, of hate, of other sundry thinges,
Of whiche I may not maken rehersinges.
And if that olde bokes were awaye,
Yloren were of remembraunce the keye.
Wel oghte us than on olde bokes leve,
Theras ther is non other assay by preve.
AND, as for me, though that my wit be
lyte,
On bokes for to rede I me delyte.

And in myn herte have hem in reverence;
And to hem yeve swich lust and swich credence,
That ther is wel unethe game noon
That from my bokes make me to goon,
But hit be othe upon the halyday,
Or elles in the joly tyme of May;
Whan that I here the smale foules singe,
And that the floures ginne for to springe,
And that the floures ginne for to springe,
Farwel my studie, as lasting that sesoun!
I have I therto this condicioun
That, of alle the floures in the mede,
Than love I most these floures whyte
and rede,
Swiche as men callen daysies in our toun.
To hem have I so greet affeccioun,
As I seyde erst, whan comen is the May,
That in my bed ther daweth me no day
That I nam up, and walking in the mede
To seen these floures agayn the sonne sprede,
Whan hit upriseth by the morwe shene,
The longe day, thus walking in the grene.
And whan the sonne ginneth for to weste,
Than closeth hit, and draweth hit to reste.
So sore hit is afered of the night,
Til on the morwe, that hit is dayes light.
This dayesye, of alle floures flour,
Fulfil of vertu and of alle honour,
And ever ylyke fair and fresh of hewe,
As wel in winter as in somer newe,
Fain wolde I preisen, if I coude aright;
But wo is me, hit lyth nat in my might!

OR wel I wot, that folk han herbeforn
Of making ropen, and lad away the
corn;
And I come after, gleneyng here and
there,
And am ful glad if I may finde an ere
Of any goodly word that they han left.
And, if hit happe me rehersen eft
That they han in her fresshe songes sayd,
I hope that they wil nat ben evel apayd,
Sith hit is seid in forthering and honour
Of hem that either serven leef or flour.
For trusteth wel, I ne have nat undertake
As of the leef, ageyn the flour, to make;
Ne of the flour to make, ageyn the leef,
No more than of the corn ageyn the sheef.
For, as to me, is leffer noon ne lother;
I am withholde yit with never nother.
I not who serveth leef, ne who the flour;
That nis nothing the entent of my labour.
For this werk is al of another tunne,
Of olde story, er swich stryf was begonne.
But wherfor that I spak, to yeve credence
To bokes olde and doon hem reverence,
Is for men shulde autoritees beleve,
Theras ther lyth non other assay by preve.
For myn entent is, or I fro yow fare,
The naked text in English to declare
Of many a story, or elles of many a geste,
As autours seyn; leveth hem if yow leste!

WHAN passed was almost the month
of May,
And I had romed, al the someres
day,
The grene medew, of which that I
yow tolde,
Upon the fresshe daysy to beholde,
And that the sonne out of the south gan weste,
And closed was the flour and goon to reste
for derknesse of the night, of which she dredde,
Hoom to myn hous ful swiftly I me spedde;
And, in a litel erber that I have,
Ybenched newe with turves fresshe ygrave,
I bad men shulde me my couche make;
for deyntee of the newe someres sake,
I bad hem strowe floures on my bed.
Whan I was layd, and had myn eyen hed,
I fel aslepe within an houre or two.
Me mette how I was in the medew tho,
And that I romed in that same gyse,
To seen that flour, as ye han herd devyse.
Fair was this medew, as thoughte me overal;
With floures swote enbrowded was it al;
As for to speke of gomme, or erbe, or tree,
Comparisoun may noon ymaked be.
for hit surmounted pleyntly alle odoures,
And eek of riche beaute alle floures.
forgeten had the erthe his pore estat
Of winter, that him naked made and mat,
And with his sword of cold so sore had greved.
Now had the atempre sonne al that releved,
And clothed him in grene al newe agayn.
The smale foules, of the seson fayn,
That from the panter and the net ben scaped,
Upon the fouler, that hem made awhaped
In winter, and destroyed had hir brood,
In his despyt, hem thoughte hit did hem good
To singe of him, and in hir song despyse
The foule cherl that, for his covetyse,
Had hem betrayed with his sophistrye.
This was hir song: The fouler we defye!
Somme songen layes on the braunches clere
Of love and May, that joye hit was to here,
In worship and in preysing of hir make,
And of the newe blisful someres sake,
That songen, Blissed be seynt Valentyn!
for at his day I chees yow to be myn,
Withoute repenting, myn herte swete!
And therewithal hir bekes gonnen mete.
They dide honour and humble obeisaunces,
And after diden other observaunces
Right plesing unto love and to nature;
So ech of hem doth wel to creature.
This song to herkne I dide al myn entente,
forwhy I mette I wiste what they mente.
Til at the laste a larke song above:
I see, quod she, the mighty god of love!
Lo! yond he cometh, I see his winges sprede!
Tho gan I loken endelong the mede,
And saw him come, and in his hond a quene,
Clothed in ryal abite al of grene.
A fret of gold she hadde next hir heer,
And upon that a whyt coron she beer

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